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## Managing Email: *Identifying and Preserving Public Records*

RI Department of State | State Archives & Public  
Records Administration



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## About Us

The Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration is part of the Division of Archives, Library, and Public Information within the Office of the Secretary of State. We are responsible for the following:

- The State Archives preserves and makes available for research Rhode Island's historic public records dating from 1638 through the present;
- The Public Records Administration provides records management assistance and storage services to state agencies; and
- We also provide advice on records management to Local Government.



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## Purpose and Scope

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Sound records management helps agencies carry out their missions, promotes accountability by documenting agency activities, and fosters open Government.

- Definitions
- Public records management
- Managing your email
- How we can help



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## Definitions

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- Public records
- Born digital records
- Records management
- Records Control Schedules
- Record series



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## Is it a public record?

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The crucial factor in deciding whether a document is a public record depends on its function and contents, not the physical means used to create, send, and keep the document. (Reference: R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-1-1.1).

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do the contents concern public business?
2. Does it serve a public function?
3. Whose office is it from?



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## Is it a Public Record?

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Questions to ask yourself:

- Does it concern official business?
- Does it serve a public function?
- What office sent it?



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## Records Management

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1. Identify
2. Save
3. Organize
4. Store
5. Preserve/Destroy



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## Records Management

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1. Identify
  - Is it a Public Record?
  - Is it a complete record?
  - Email is an adequate record when it includes:
    - ✓ Context of creation
    - ✓ Content
    - ✓ Structure



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### 2. Save

- You are the originator
  - The person who created and sent the email message.
- You are replying to an email message, thus creating a new record.
  - You must save it as a complete email message (including all of the original text, your additions and any attachments you may add).
- You receive an email message from outside the department, and the following conditions apply:
  - It forms part of a departmental record; and
  - You are the first person from your department named on:
    - » The “To” field of the email.
    - » The “CC” field of the email.



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### 3. Organize for:

- Effective retrieval;
- Access (and discovery) responsiveness;
- Easier information sharing; and
- Disposal and retention in accordance with records retention schedules.



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### 4. Store

- Centralized and shared drives or servers designated by agency policy as its official records storage repository are recommended.
- Ensure that these systems employ appropriate back-up, security, preservation provisions, and system documentation.



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### 5. Preserve/Destroy

- Destroy according to approved retention. Don't "just keep it all."
- Why appropriately destroy email? Because risks are:
  - ✓ Discovery risks and legal fees;
  - ✓ Administration costs for maintenance and control;
  - ✓ Burden of recopying or moving on to new technology;
  - ✓ Disaster, recovery and restoration; and
  - ✓ Passing storage and maintenance costs of obsolete email on to successors.



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## Managing your email

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Agencies bear responsibility for the establishment of records management programs and for the proper management of their records.

This means that as a government employee you are responsible for:

- Creating records that are complete enough to document all legally mandated activities; and
- Maintaining records of policies, decisions, and transactions.



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## Organizing Your Mailbox

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**Imagine people need to find your information quickly**

- Determine the category of the record.
- Think in terms of file folders with names or titles.
- Your Agency Records Control Schedule is your best guide.

**Organizing means Naming + Classifying + Filing**

- Save the entire email with all header/footer information and all previous messages in the thread.
- Save all associated attachments (unless they are completely irrelevant to the message).
- Apply your organization's file naming conventions (if available) or use meaningful file names when saving email.



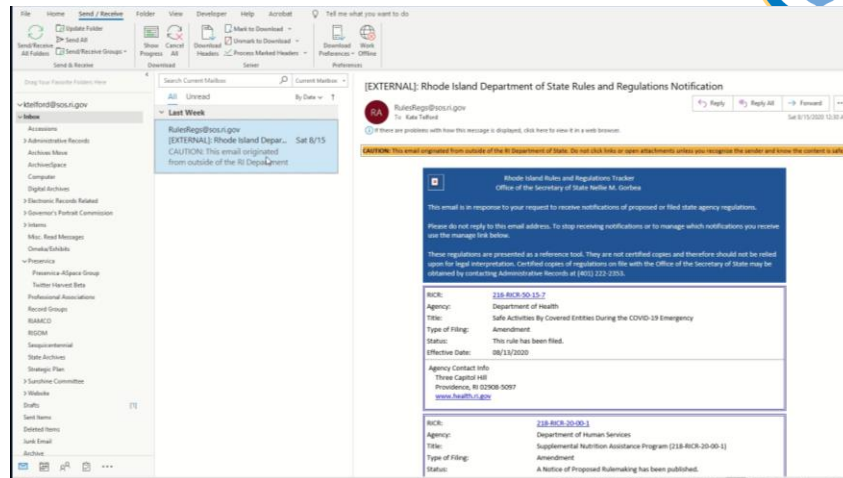
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## Establishing Mailbox Rules

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## Best Practices

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- Limit the email to one main topic to ensure accuracy in filing/classifying the message, when possible.
- Use meaningful subject lines that reflect the content of the email message.
- Use meaningful and descriptive titles on email attachments.
- Be careful with personal comments and opinions – they will become part of the record.



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## Best Practices

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Use official signatures for all outgoing email messages containing official business.

- Signature files should contain:
  - Sender's name;
  - Sender's title (optional but advisable)
  - Institution;
  - Telephone and fax numbers;
  - Postal address; and
  - Email address.



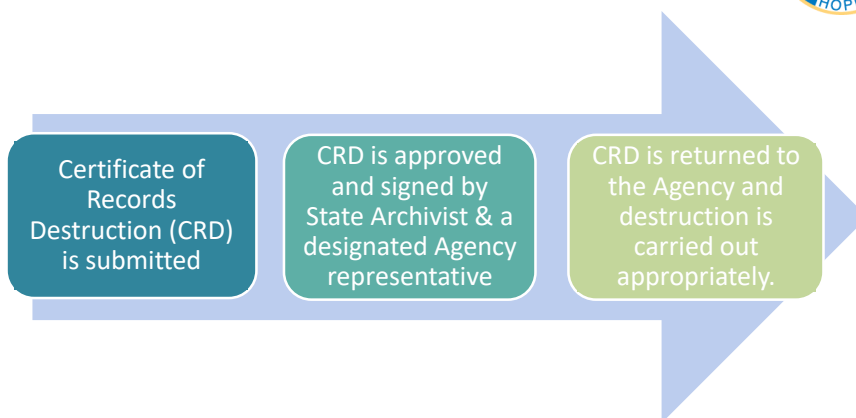
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## Records Destruction

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## In Review

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- **Establish what is a Public Record**
- **Organize your inbox**
  - ✓ Your Records Control Schedule is key.
  - ✓ Establishing Rules can be beneficial.
- **Destroy or preserve appropriately**
  - ✓ Complete a CRD for all public records you intend to delete/destroy.
  - ✓ Reach out to the State Archives and Public Records Administration for assistance.



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## Questions?

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